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Volume 17 Number 11

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Part 1

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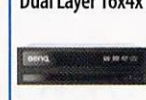
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In selected regions ...

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Building the ultimate gaming PC

Part 1 of 5

TechXNY 2004: Outsourcing ahoy!

A reason to smile

A neophyte's quest for a digital camera



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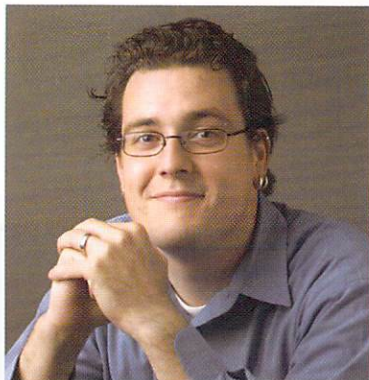
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Editorial



From seeing a preview of snapshots nearly instantly to getting said snapshots printed online, photo archiving and sharing. There can be little doubt that digital has fundamentally changed photography. With the advent of improved and higher resolution image capture planes, photographers no longer have to choose between instant gratification and high quality prints.

As Chad Sapieha examines some of the options in online digital photo fulfillment sites and compares the results (pg 9), it's clear that some companies – while they seem to recognize that the paradigm shift has already taken place from celluloid to diodes – don't want users to unlearn everything from the pre-digital days. Namely, getting pictures in hard copy.

Many digital photographers it seems are content to snap pictures, offload them from memory card to home computer, organize and

(hopefully) back them up. When the time comes to share those pictures, often that's a digital affair too; they're sent through email, posted to a personal Web site or shared via photo discs, displayed as a digital slide show on a computer or television etc.

I've always been a proponent of the do-it-yourself approach to ... well, to anything I can do myself.

My own love affair with photography began with black and white. Buying film in bulk and loading my own canisters, carrying my old Pentax K1000 SLR everywhere with me and putting together a functional (if terribly awkward) darkroom in the crawlspace of my mother's house. I must have breathed in untold quantities of chemical fumes from the developer, stop bath and fixer.

I don't take nearly as many "photographs" these days. However, the fact that each picture captured doesn't directly translate to money spent on film means I take more point and shoot-style snapshots of family, friends and the like. Still, I can't remember the last time I made prints of a digital photograph beyond doing a specific printer review.

Now the only fumes I breathe in the exploration of photography come in the form of that new electronics smell that wafts from the just opened boxes of digital cameras that make their way into the office. What is that anyway?

Enjoy the issue,

Andrew Moore-Crispin
Editor-in-Chief

Last month we asked for your opinions on Canadian copyright as it pertains to P2P file sharing. The vast majority of letters suggested a change in the copyright laws was in order.

Eric German writes: I downloaded a few songs the first few days (after getting a new computer) and showed told my wife about all the potential songs we could download and put onto CDs. We ended up discussing the legality of services like Kazaa. Though there does not seem to be any barrier to using them in Canada, she pointed out that one has to know that these services are really cheating the artists. You can spin all the legal arguments you want, but from an ethical point of view one has to admit that it is not right.

Letter of the Month

The Letter of the Month was written by **Jacob Kingston**:

The record labels and music store conglomerates need to get with the times. Over the top restrictions placed on purchased CDs or purchased and downloaded digital music files aren't the answer to declining music sales. Fair use is sacrificed to keep a contingent of people from being able to share music. Ironically, the people affected by restrictions aren't the pirates, it's the non-techies who purchased a CD only to find it couldn't be ripped to a computer for use with an MP3 player.

The Canadian copyright laws need to be updated. However, there needs to be a balance between protecting the copyright holders and giving consumers fair use rights.

For his letter, Jacob wins a copy of Madden NFL 2005 for PC. Have fun.

This month, in addition to feedback on the issue, tell us **what you do with your digital pictures?** Do you print them? Share them? Leave them to languish? Give us your thoughts: **letters@ppublishing.ca**.

The Letter of the Month will receive a Konica Minolta 3.2 megapixel Dimage E323 digital camera. This fully automatic camera has a 12X zoom range (3X Optical, 4X Digital), image rotation and slide show playback functions and a 6X megapixel Interpolation option for creating supersize images.



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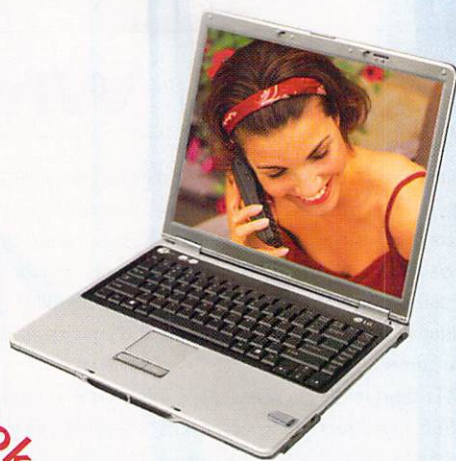
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Ultimate notebook meets virtual office



In our search for the perfect combination of size and performance, we came up with the X-Note series – notebooks that make no compromises. Starting with an Intel Centrino processor, we added one of the brightest LCD screens on the market, a 10-hour extended life battery* and a Quad Band wireless antenna, all packed into an ultra slim titanium and carbon fibre package that weighs a mere 2.4 kgs.

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Why Digital SLR?

While most people looking to buy a digital camera will be perfectly happy with a point-and-shoot model – they're easy-to-use, provide adequate resolution for most circumstances, and aren't too expensive – those more familiar with 35mm SLR cameras may have a hankering for something with more manual control. Thankfully, there's a new generation of Digital SLR cameras aimed at the photo-savvy consumer or "prosumer."

SLR is short for Single Lens Reflex. This style of camera uses a series of mirrors to redirect whatever the lens "sees" back up into the optical viewfinder on the back of the camera. This allows photographers to frame shots precisely: what you see is what you get. By contrast, many point-and-shoot cameras use a separate lens for the optical viewfinder (which means you're seeing something slightly different from your final photo), or an LCD viewfinder (which can make it difficult to focus). Digital SLRs can't display an image preview on their LCD screens, however. The shutter has to be open to move the mirror assembly (reflecting images through a prism and to the user's eye) for light to hit the image plane. This also means that movie mode is out.

With a point-and-shoot model, photographers are generally stuck with whatever lens the camera came with, whether or not it's suited to the shot at hand. With a digital SLR, you can quickly and easily swap the standard lens for a fisheye lens, a zoom lens or whatever else you have in the camera bag.

Even better, in many cases the lenses that worked with an old-school SLR camera can be used with the digital versions offered by the same manufacturer. The main thing to note here is that the new lenses designed for digital SLR models have extra functionality (autofocus capabilities and the ability to report to the camera which settings were used most notably), while compatible old-school lenses have to be used manually.

Manual control over the image is another highlight. With the flip of a finger it's possible to adjust your focus point, change your shutter speed or aperture to the settings you want instead of what the camera thinks you want, and to zoom in without waiting for a motor. When you're ready to take the shot, digital SLRs are fast ... there's almost no lag time between hitting the shutter button and capturing the image. Here's a small selection of digital SLRs we've had the chance to test out.

Canon Digital Rebel

www.canon.ca

Estimated price: \$1,100 (body only); \$1,300 (with 18-55mm lens)

The Digital Rebel is one of the most popular and the most affordable of the digital SLR models; that's not a coincidence. Its affordability is no doubt partly due to its use of a 6.3 megapixel CMOS sensor instead of a CCD; nonetheless, the image quality is excellent. It also features a design that's ... well, more fun than the other models. The downside is that, while you can manually focus, the focus ring on many of the lenses is little more than a ridge at the very end of the lens barrel ... not so easy to grab if you're in a hurry. Those inclined to use auto-focus instead will find the lower price of the Digital Rebel very tempting.

Nikon D70

www.nikon.ca

Estimated price: \$1,450 (body only); \$1,900 (with 18-70mm lens)

Armed with a design familiar to anyone coming from the film-based SLR world, the D70 is definitely digital, with a 6.1-megapixel sensor onboard. The camera is compatible with several decades' worth of lenses from Nikon's F line of analogue cameras. Even with the slightly higher price of the camera body, you may well make up the difference in cheaper used lenses. No surprise that the camera performs up to expectations: the images are excellent and the camera is fast ... a winning combination.

Olympus E-1

www.olympus.com

Estimated price: \$1,800 (body only)

Designed digital from the ground up, the prosumer E-1 system will force you to buy a completely new set of lenses. That said, the E-1 uses a 5.5-megapixel 4/3rds-size sensor that's specifically designed to work with said lenses ... no compromise and no distortion. The redesign of the image path also means the E-1's lenses are smaller and lighter than traditional lenses – a 200mm E-1 lens has roughly equivalent telephoto capabilities as a 400mm standard lens – which means the ability to equip yourself with the lenses you need without weighing yourself down too much. Those looking for a cheaper all-digital SLR may want to wait until the launch of Olympus's E-300 Evolt model, an 8 megapixel consumer-oriented model due in December.

by Sean Carruthers



Canon Digital Rebel



Nikon D70



Olympus E-1

MAXXUM 7D



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Creative power is in the palm of your hand, with the Maxxum 7D digital SLR camera from Konica Minolta. This powerful digital camera inherits the operating ease of the award-winning 35mm Maxxum 7 AF SLR, and maintains full compatibility with the Maxxum system of lenses and accessories, offering you the highest level of optical and photo-imaging quality, so you can take beautiful photos in any situation.



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- High-Definition, 2.5-inch Color LCD Monitor
- High-Speed Autofocusing

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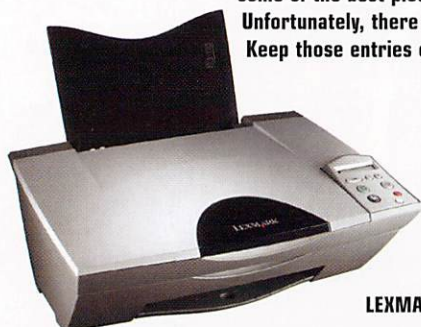
THE WINNER:

Congratulations to **Richard Lindzon** of Toronto, ON whose untitled entry wins our Autumn Adventures-themed bi-monthly Photo Spree contest.

Richard used a Fuji S2 to capture the image and resized it in Adobe Photoshop 7.0.

For submitting the winning image, Richard wins a Lexmark X5250 All-in-One photo-quality printer, scanner and colour copier.

Congratulations Richard and thanks to all our readers for sending in some of the best pictures we've seen to date. Unfortunately, there can only be one winner. Keep those entries coming!



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THE RULES: You must use a digital camera to capture the subject. Work can be submitted via email (contest@ppublishing.ca). Accompanying your photo should be the make and model of the camera you used, the names of any software you used to modify the image and, if possible, the f/stop and shutter speed you used to take the photo.

Submit your photographs, along with the information from the form below, by December 20th, 2004. You can submit up to three photographs, all of which must be accompanied by a submission form. Entries must be submitted via email. Files should be no bigger than 500 KB and no smaller than 300 KB. One photo per email.

Contest Rules: Prizes must be claimed by January 21st 2005. Winners must provide valid identification upon claiming prize. The prizes awarded are not transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash. To enter and to be eligible to win, persons must be residents of Canada, and not employees or be domiciled with an employee of Piccolo Publishing, its affiliate companies, or advertising or promotional agencies. The winners will be selected by HUB on December 23rd, 2004 from among all eligible entries received on or before contest close date. Winners will be contacted by telephone or email. In the event that they cannot be contacted within the first week following the contest another entrant will be selected. All entries become the property of HUB and may be used in subsequent advertisements for the contest. All entries must be submitted by their artist and must be original work.

HUB's Photo Spree contest form. All submissions must contain this information. Send to contest@hubcanada.com

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TechXNY 2004: Outsourcing ahoy

It's been a rough few years for New York City's TechXNY show. Following its name change from PC Expo, the show's been bumped from summer into the fall, and suffered an attendance hit after the 9/11 attacks in New York.

While the show has regained a bit of its momentum, it's still struggling to look like a relevant technology tradeshow; it was perhaps telling that the show – which used to take up a good percentage of the Jacob Javits Convention Center – was outshined this year by a home show and a fabric expo in other parts of the building.

It's also a bad omen that one of the largest booths was rented not by a technology company but by Johnny Walker, there solely to hold hourly Scotch tastings. It was almost certainly a highlight for many of the attendees who probably wondered why they bothered coming at all, after seeing the sparseness of the exhibits. Perhaps they were just feeling nervous about the size of the Outsourcing pavilion ... designed to send North American jobs to places like Philippines and Romania, where they'll be done "for a fraction of the cost!"

There was definitely a shortage of big-name companies at this year's show. Part of the reason may have been the debut of the DigitalLife the following week, in the same convention center but with a bigger consumer electronics focus. By contrast, TechXNY – once considered the NYC technology showcase – must have seemed too much like yesterday's news.

Nonetheless, a few of the major manufacturers were in attendance, and there were some pretty cool gadgets on the floor ... you just had to look hard for them.

Iomega showed off a number of its storage products, including the tiny Mini Drive USB memory keys, now available in capacities of one gigabyte. The company also featured the NAS 100d, its recently-released network-attached storage product which doubles as a Wi-Fi access point; if you have Wi-Fi already it can be configured as a wireless 160 or 250 gigabyte repository for multimedia files.

IBM had a pretty tiny booth considering the company's reputation, but it showed off a number of new products. One of the most interesting was the new ThinkPad T42 with integrated biometrics; instead of having to remember your passwords, you can just swipe your fingerprint. (It also keeps out people who don't have access to your fingers.)

Hewlett-Packard showed products from across its different divisions, including wide-format DesignJet printers capable of holding rolls of photo paper. Though they're definitely aimed at production houses, it's easy to see serious photographers checking out the 2400 dpi six-colour DesignJet 130, which has a 24-inch carriage width suitable for poster-sized prints. At US\$1,300, though, you have to be pretty committed. The company also showed the forthcoming iPaq 6315, which is a Pocket PC/cell phone combo; it will be available through T-Mobile in the U.S., availability in Canada to be determined.

Xerox had a few new copier/printer combos on display, but we also got a sneak peek at a couple of new high-speed laser printers. The Phaser 5500 prints out pages at a blazing 50 pages per minute, whether it's printing single-sided or duplexed jobs; it comes in a basic model but can add paper trays and finishing modules until it resembles a full-sized copy centre. For something more basic, the Phaser 3150 is designed to fit on an individual desktop; it prints 22 pages per minute.

Belkin had a small booth this show, but used it to preview its forthcoming "Pre-N" wireless networking technology. It was also showing off the new PureAV RemoteTV wireless product, designed to wirelessly transfer a TV signal from one end of your house to a television at the other end.

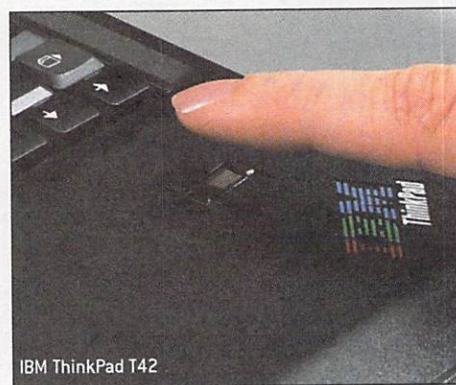
Perhaps the most interesting product on display was the Migo, a USB key-style product that turns any computer you plug it into your computer. Well, kinda: it saves a subset of your Outlook email correspondence and your desktop settings onto a secured portion of the key, and when you run an applet on the unsecured portion it makes whatever computer you're working on act like your own machine, including sending and receiving email. When you're done, just unplug the key and there's no trace of your work on the machine. Very cool.

The Canadian contingent was also on the show floor. ElectroVaya, known for its long-lasting battery technology, has updated its portable computing line with a full-on notebook model, the Li 3312. It uses the company's Lithium polymer battery technology for long runtime. I also got a sneak peek from the Harmony remote control division of Logitech, who will be releasing a model specifically designed for Windows Media Centre PCs.

by Sean Carruthers



Belkin Pure AV RemoteTV



IBM ThinkPad T42



Iomega NAS 100d

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iDrive is mobile storage solution that is designed to let you carry your document files, music files, video clips and more. Its ultra slim size (only 8.5mm thickness) is small enough to be put right into your pocket. Covering with aluminum outer case, it makes the HDD durable and heat can be dissipated easily. With its USB 2.0 high speed interface, it allows data transfer speed at 32MB/s reading and 14MB/s writing. Real time video streaming is as easy as it gets.

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Ultra-cool

the new point and shoot digital cameras

Remember the days when a two megapixel camera was the best of the best? No more, because megapixels are on the rise, with top-end consumer models topping out and seven and eight megapixels. Remember to budget extra for a high-capacity memory card, though; when you're shooting at highest quality, you'll need it.

Canon PowerShot G6

www.canon.ca Estimated price: \$900

Pros

- 7.1 megapixel resolution
- Good manual control
- Remote control

Cons

- Awkward button placement and handgrip
- Memory card small for the resolution

Canon's PowerShot G6 has a 7.1 megapixel image sensor and a 4x optical zoom, and also offers great manual control and menu systems. You can shoot using the optical viewfinder or the articulated 2.5-inch

LCD panel on the back; when not in use, the LCD can be spun inwards and folded against the body of the camera for protection. Now the negative: like other cameras sporting the G name, this one is a bit bricklike, even with the protruding handgrip. If you have small hands, it may be difficult to hold, but the buttons are awkwardly placed no matter what size your hand is. The PowerShot G6 uses CompactFlash memory, and comes with an insufficient (for the resolution) 32MB storage card.

Fujifilm FinePix E550

www.fujifilm.ca Estimated price: \$550

Pros

- 6.3 megapixel SuperCCD
- Easy-to-use F menu
- Uses two rechargeable AA batteries

Cons

- xD memory card only 16 mb
- Very small optical viewfinder

Even though the FinePix E550 has a 6.3 megapixel image sensor, you can save your images as 12.3 megapixel files. That's thanks to the company's SuperCCD sensor and a bit of process-

ing; the downside is that the images are interpolated, which means you're not getting a true 12.3 megapixel image. Either way, the camera only comes with a 16 meg xD memory card, which is simply not enough memory for either resolution. The camera is easy to use thanks to the F menu; just press the button with the F on it and you have easy access to resolution, ISO and colour menus; for more shooting options, hit the menu button instead. For a camera at this price point, it has amazing manual options.

Nikon Coolpix 8400

www.nikon.ca Estimated price: \$1,070

The Coolpix 8400 features the same eight megapixel sensor that's found in the 8700 and 8800, but by keeping the zoom lens to a magnification of only 3.5x (instead of 8 and 10 respectively), the camera is more compact. The camera retains great manual control, and a series of scene modes including portrait, fireworks, night shooting, snow, macro, sunset, backlight and panorama assist

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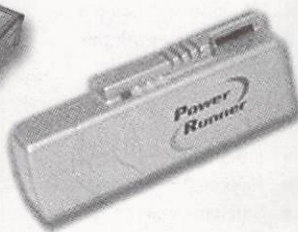
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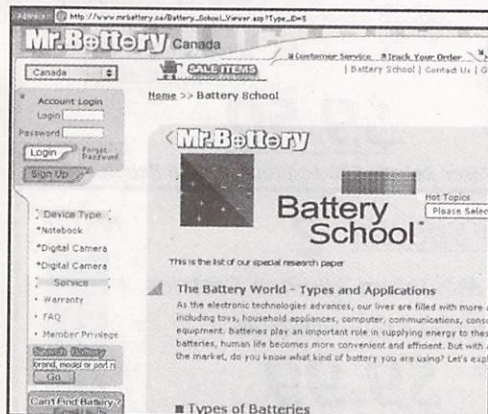
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Pros

- 8 megapixel resolution
- Accessory ring accepts lens converters

Cons

- Bad placement of strap mount and on/off switch
- Memory sold separately

also takes lens accessories. The Coolpix 8400 uses CompactFlash memory for shooting, but you'll have to buy the card separately. There are a few design quirks worth mentioning with the 8400. First of all, the right-hand strap mount is located almost exactly where and index finger will fall when holding the camera naturally. Secondly, the on/off switch is located around the outside of the shutter button; until you're used to this configuration, you may accidentally turn off the camera when you want to zoom.

Olympus Verve

www.olympusamerica.com

Estimated price: \$470

Pros

- Weatherproofed casing
- different colours

Cons

- short zoom range
- limited manual features

modes. There are modes on the dial for setting white balance and ISO, and there's a manual focus option. Skip the LCD viewfinder in the eye-piece and use the 1.8-inch panel on the back, which flips out and spins around. There's a flash built in, but there's also a mount on the top for Nikon accessories. The lens mount

The Verve is obviously designed more as a fashion accessory than as a high-powered camera. While there's no full manual, there are multiple scene modes, for shooting self-portrait, behind-glass, fireworks, night scene and more.

Because the design is so small, the Verve has a shorter zoom range than usual – only 2x optical. What it does have is a weatherproofed casing, meaning you can take it out in almost any weather without having to worry about damaging it. It also features a movie-shooting mode.

Panasonic Lumix FX-7

www.panasonic.ca

Estimated price: \$700

Pros

- Exceptionally compact
- Large LCD viewfinder
- Optical image stabilization

Cons

- limited manual control
- High cost per megapixel
- Small memory card

Panasonic has now migrated its optical image stabilization – designed to compensate for hand movements – into its ultra-compact models. Barely bigger than a deck of cards, the FX-7 has a 5 megapixel image sensor, a 3x optical zoom and a 2.5-inch LCD monitor that takes up almost the entire back panel.

There's limited manual functionality, but the camera comes with many shooting modes including macro, self-portrait, snow, night, fireworks and others. The camera uses SecureDigital memory, but only ships with a 16MB card. At \$700 for a camera with only 5 megapixels, you're definitely paying for the ultra-compact design and the image stabilization. The thing is, it may be worth it.

By Sean Carruthers

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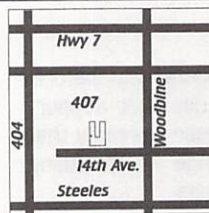
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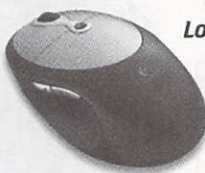


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Photo Software: Your Desktop Darkroom

Pretty much every piece of photography or imaging gear you buy comes with two or three discs of software. It's great for getting started, but eventually you'll start bumping into the limitations.

When you check the software rack for more-powerful alternatives, you'll find two leading contenders: Photoshop Elements 3.0, from Adobe (\$140) and Image Suite 10, from Microsoft (\$190). They're both friendly and powerful, but with a distinct difference in character. What they have in common, though, are several main functions.

First, indexing and retrieval of images. Both Photoshop Elements and Digital Image Suite create a central image catalog, allowing you to categorize and search your photos, or archive them onto CD- or DVD-recordable discs.

Second, editing. Your camera's software probably does "red-eye" reduction, but there's a world of other possibilities, from sharpening the focus to erasing annoying powerlines from the skyline. Photoshop Elements and Digital Image Suite give you an arsenal of powerful painting tools to make your images look better.

And third, output: not just printing your images so as to take best advantage of expensive photo paper, but also creating standalone slideshows for computer or DVD player, or Web pages that can be viewed online. Or just emailing a single image, automatically resized so as not to choke Mom's dial-up connection.

Finally, a big advantage of both Photoshop Elements and Digital Image Suite is that they combine all these functions into a consistent environment. If you're getting confused jumping from scanning software to image editor to printer module, either package can greatly simplify post-shutter digital photography.

Photoshop Elements 3.0

Photoshop Elements 3.0 provides the functions you'd expect in a traditional image-editing package, but it's much friendlier and with a powerful image browser and some handy extra modules thrown in.

The browser (formerly the separate Photoshop Album) lets you easily tag thumbnail images by dragging category names onto them. You can also group similar images into Stacks, keep multiple edits of an image as a Version Set, or assemble image Collections that you can later output together.

The editor has been streamlined, with more guided procedures and online tutorials. Yet many commands remain true to the professional version of Photoshop, a real benefit if you ever decide to step up.

Adobe's Healing Brush tool is now included, for intelligently erasing dust marks or facial blemishes. Quick Fix view combines common adjustments such as brightness, color and sharpness, and adds a Smart Fix tool that

can usually guess what needs to be done.

A neat new feature helps you get your older photos into the computer. Scan a bunch of originals side-by-side, and Divide Scanned Photos can automatically separate them into individual image files and even straighten them if necessary.



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AX600PRO 128MB, TVOut PCIX	201 ⁹⁵
AX600XT 128MB, TVOut PCIX	282 ⁹⁵
AX600XTHD 128MB, TVOut PCIX	298 ⁹⁵
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DLINK Switch 8-port 10/100 DSS-8+	69 ⁹⁵
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DLINK Switch 24-port 10/100 DES-1024D	149 ⁹⁵
LINKSYS Switch 4-port PSUS4	80 ⁹⁵

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ROUTERS

DLINK Router 4-port DI-604	57 ⁹⁵
DLINK Router 4-port w/LPT Port DI-704P	82 ⁹⁵
DLINK Router 8-port w/LPT Port DI-707P	107 ⁹⁵
LINKSYS Router 4-port NR041	53 ⁹⁵

ADAPTERS

DLINK 10/100 NIC DFE-538-TX (PCI)	23 ⁹⁵
DLINK 10/100 NIC DGE-550-T (PCI)	108 ⁹⁵
DLINK 10/100/1000 NIC DGE-530T (PCI)	39 ⁹⁵

PCMCIA/CARDBUS

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DLINK Wireless Router DI-514 (b)	74 ⁹⁵
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In the House

Pros

- Lots of ways of collecting images
- Traditional image editor
- Long track record in imaging

Cons

- Separate functions need some learning
- Lacks a few power tools (e.g. tone curves)

For output, Elements lets you email images, design calendars or greeting cards, create Web photo galleries or Acrobat-format (PDF) slideshows, and even burn collections to Video CDs that can be viewed on most DVD players.

Digital Image Suite 10

Digital Image Suite favors novice users with no particular interest in becoming experts. It takes a procedural approach to editing, using prompts and Wizard dialogs to walk step-by-step through editing tasks and creative activities.

Digital Image Suite sticks with the "quick fix" approach, keeping

friendly tools and text prompts available in a panel on the right. But while Microsoft has kept everything goof-proof, it hasn't skimped on power. For example, there's pro-style tone "curve" brightness con-

Pros

- Friendly Wizards and prompts
- Remarkable editing power
- Tons of graphic content for projects

Cons

- No nested categories in catalog
- No fast-track editing for experts

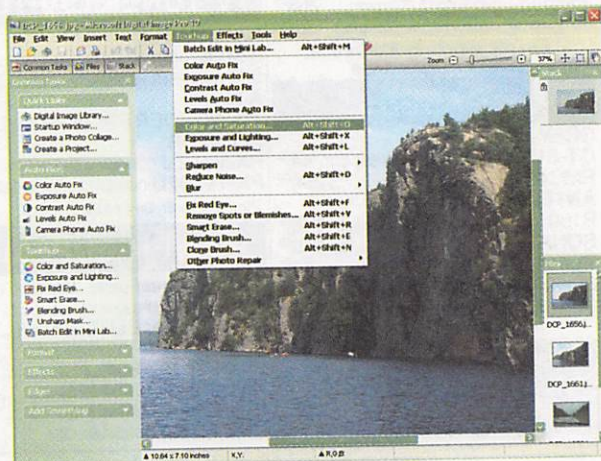
trol (still AWOL in Photoshop Elements), plus sophisticated filters for noise reduction and sharpening.

The Digital Image Suite photo catalog is a bit less elegant than the one in Photoshop Elements, and lacks the ability to create sub-categorization of categories. But on the plus side, it will look familiar to users of Windows Explorer, with folders shown in a 'tree' view at the left.

A second CD offers thousands of templates and graphic embellishments, for greeting cards, calendars or other creative projects. Each type of project is designed in a separate program window. Again, the emphasis is on ease of use; there are copious prompts and error messages every step of the way.

Photo Story is a fun addition, allowing creation of movie-style slideshows with complex pan and zoom effects, narration and music.

By Frank Lenk



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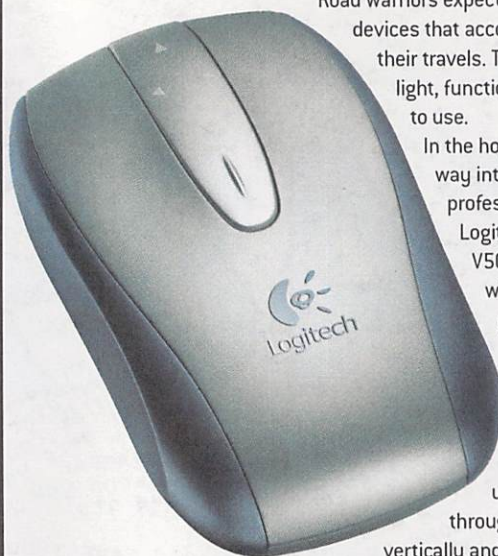
We still can't deduce what, if anything, the term m;robe represents. At a guess, it's a chance to give the underused semicolon some play in a product title.

Two new players kick off the m;robe line. The MR-500i incorporates a 1.22 megapixel camera and an interesting 3.7-inch VGA touch screen that eliminates buttons from the face of the device.

All functions, including music playback, picture viewing and taking, EQ adjustment, playlisting etc. are taken care of using the touch screen interface.

The 20GB MR-500i ships with a two-line display wired remote at an estimated \$699.95 at retail. The other of Olympus' inaugural digital music players is the MR-100 at 5GB, minus the digital camera, colour screen and other features at half the price.

m;robe MR-500i



Road warriors expect a lot from the devices that accompany them in their travels. They must be small, light, functional and comfortable to use.

In the hope of making their way into a few more mobile professionals' laptop bags, Logitech released the V500 wireless mouse with solid-state scroll pad. Similar to the scroll wheels on certain digital audio players, the pad is touch sensitive and allows users to scroll through documents both vertically and horizontally.

In the interest of keeping size down, the V500 uses a small 2.4 GHz "Micro-Receiver" that plugs in to a USB port when the mouse is in use and is stored in a pop out compartment underneath the mouse when it's not.

At about \$87 (from US\$69.95 MSRP), the V500 brings with it a premium price tag.

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Today's Digicams: what's new pussycat?

If you're reading this, chances are you're in the market for a new digital camera.

After all, these swank new "digicams" are dropping in price all the time, while new features are being implemented such as higher megapixels, better optical zoom and smarter software that can make clumsy point-and-shoot users look closer to a professional shutterbug.



Problem is, with so many cameras on the market, it can be overwhelming to choose one that best suits your needs – and wallet. And when it comes to technology, we all have that fear of buying something that will be obsolete in a year.

So, consider this feature a brief look at a few new digital cameras on the market – each one offering something unique. Be aware prices may vary slightly between national or local retailers, so do your homework!

Hit me with your best shot

The Nikon Coolpix 5100 houses a clever feature called the "Best Shot Selector." The camera takes a series of shots in rapid-fire succession then automatically picks and stores the clearest one out of the bunch. Couple this with Nikon's effective image stabilizing system and you may not see another blurry shot again. What's more, this 5.1-megapixel camera also features 14.5MB of internal memory so you've got a built-in backup should you run out of space on your SD card. \$469.95; Nikon.ca

Pocket power

If you're looking for a compact digicam but don't want to sacrifice quality for convenience, Sony's new Cyber-shot DSC P150 claims itself as the world's smallest 7.2-megapixel camera (51.5mm x 26.6 mm x 10.8 mm). It should be noted that there only seems to be one other 7.2 megapixel camera; Sony's own Cyber-shot DSC-V3.

This means the cell phone-sized camera can produce high-quality photos (up to 3,072 x 2,304 pixels) that can be enlarged into decent quality poster-sized prints, if so desired. Featuring a 3x optical zoom Carl Zeiss Vario-Tessar lens and 1/1.8" CCD, this stylish camera also offers ultra

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Movie maker

While not as new as the other products in this round-up, the Canon PowerShot S1 IS, launched this past February, not only includes an impressive 10X optical 38-380mm zoom lens but the digicam features an enhanced video mode that lets you to shoot up to 60 minutes of VGA movies (640 x 480 pixels) at 30 frames per second. Let's face it, there are times when a still image won't do such as a baby's first steps, a win-

ning goal at a soccer match or your pet doing something silly. This 3.2 megapixel camera also offers a full array of automatic and manual settings and shooting modes. \$649.99; Canon.com

Through the looking glass

Digital SLR (single lens reflex) cameras are one of the fastest growing

products among "prosumers" because what you see through the viewfinder is exactly what the lens is capturing. Olympus' new 8-megapixel Evolt E300 – which should be available by the time you read this – is unique because of its radically different body shape that eliminates the hulking pentaprism commonly found on the top of traditional SLRs. What's more, the side swing mirror box and "flash forward" pop-up mechanism also adds to the camera's unique look and functionality. Price is TBA; olympusamerica.com

By Marc Saltzman



PC-less printing goes mobile

Now that millions of Canadians are carrying around camera cell phones, Kodak has devised an easy way to print photos for those with Bluetooth-enabled handsets.

The Kodak EasyShare Printer Dock Plus (\$269.95; kodak.ca) lets users wirelessly print images stored on a camera cell phone – as long as they're within roughly 30 feet of each other.

As with past Printer Dock products, this portable printer creates borderless 4x6-inch photos in less than a minute without the need for a PC.

We know what you're thinking: "Er, camera phone images are too low-res, so they'll look too grainy as a 4x6 image!" You're probably right – even if you own one of the newer 1-megapixel camera cell phones. But the Printer Dock Plus lets you print one, two, four or nine images on each 4x6-inch sheet.

The product lets users plop down supported cameras (such as the Kodak 600/6000 and 700/7000-series digital cameras) on top of the unit, which also acts as a recharger for the camera's battery. The printer also accepts SD/MMC memory cards and supports cameras with PictBridge technology.

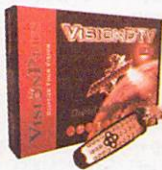
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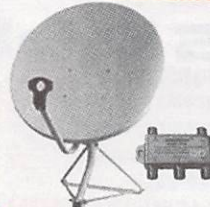
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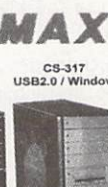
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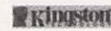


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A tale of two cameras

When our six year-old headed off to camp last summer, a camera seemed just as essential as sunscreen and bug spray.

Since there was no way Marika was taking the family's digital unit, we bought her a toss-away. Much to our surprise, even little campers find the old point-and-shoot process unsatisfying these days. There's the shoddy quality, but worse – if by the age of six you already know what it means to shoot and review, then shooting blind (read: no digital review) is well, not even real photography.

I admit a wave of nostalgia passes over me on those rare occasions when I see someone unpack a stack of glossy double prints. But I relax when I see the price; even more so when I hear, "Here's the ONE really good picture [out of 36]!"

With Marika's birthday approaching, I started thinking back to when I turned seven. My grandfather gifted me a Minolta 16 Ps. A quick google search reveals it was one of several Ps versions and slightly dated by the time I got it in 1971 (Hm! And I thought it was off-the-shelf).

The tiny camera took black and white images and had special, expensive film cartridges, which initially had to be mailed in for processing. If I remember correctly, we got them back in about six weeks.

On the flip side, the camera was extremely easy to use. Best of all ... I had a camera! The first picture was one my grandfather took of me; the second was the one I took of him. The rest of the roll featured my younger sisters climbing a tree: all you could see were the branches.

These decades-old experiences formed the context for our search today.

We needed a camera for our daughter that would meet the demands of a child photographer, and parents not willing to make severe digital compromises (if the picture's no good, what's the point?). I had reviewed enough so-called digital kids' cameras to know many are just digital toss-aways. We found a digital equivalent of my first camera: easy-to-use, and 2 million megapixels – that's the modern day image size of my first Minolta. Refurbished, it's one of the better, cheaper, digital cameras still available. The first "virtual" picture was one Marika took of me; the next was the one I took of Marika. Next comes a series of images featuring her sisters.

Sound familiar?

Of course the big question, now that we have the camera and the pictures are being shot is what happens next? When I proposed this article to HUB's editor I imagined taking Marika through day-by-day explorations of the wonders of digital photography. You know – editing images, printing, create virtual postcards – all the things adults never have time for. Which, as it turns out, is exactly why Marika's not into it either, at least not yet. Although her interest was piqued by the fact she could put a heart-shaped frame around an image and print off pictures before heading off to a birthday party, the biggest thrill, it seems, is in the shoot itself. And of course, the chance to review and delete. (I have to laugh when Marika's three year-old sister requests to "see" what's been taken. On-the-go editing is part of the photography process now).

Although I regret not having printed out Marika's youngest sister's baby photos (which does cause some sibling angst), and though I do love albums, I just can't press myself, nor my daughter, to follow through the traditional post-picture taking process.

I was hoping we could get some help from Marika's grandmother, who has not given up on film, but has been bitten by the wow!-you-crop-it-and-I'll-bring-the-disk-in-for-developing bug.



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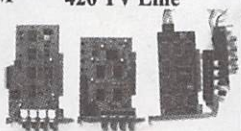
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But after seeing the way grandma enjoyed a photo slide show last night I'm thinking even she is changing her photo-viewing habits. Which means I'll have to just sit back and wait to see what these kids decide will be the future of photography ...

By Mara Gulens

CAMERA COMPARISON CHART

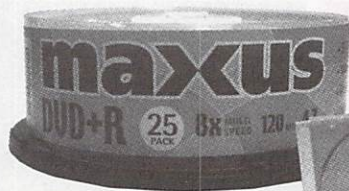
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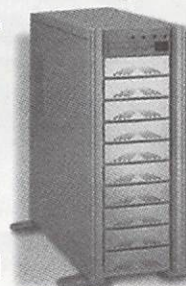
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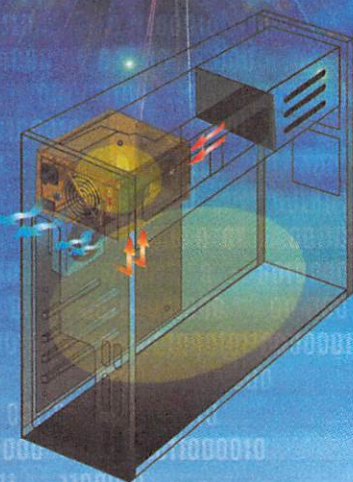
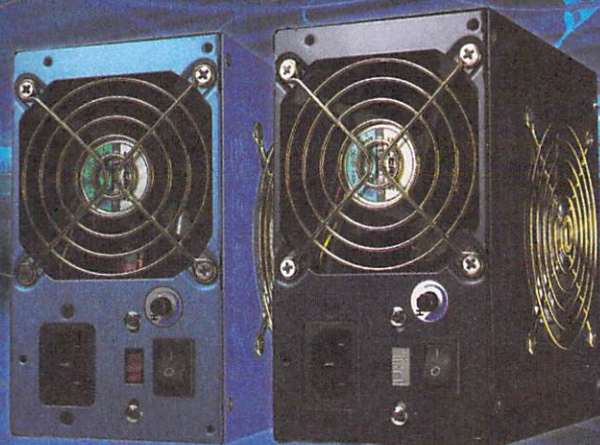
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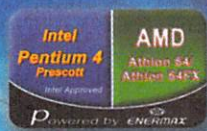
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A reason to Smile

A neophyte's quest for a digital camera

While I've never been an early adopter, there's one piece of technology that I suddenly realize I've been coveting, one that even my less than technically-inclined friends have had for months yet I still haven't gotten around to buying – the digital camera. Like many people, I'd held off because I like to educate myself about what I'm about to buy, and haven't yet made the time to do so. Unfortunately to become knowledgeable you either need to invest some research time, or come across a helpful, informative article in your local technology magazine. I've done the former so someone else can hopefully take the latter route. Here's how I became the proud new owner of a digital camera:

Checklist

Can't remember what to ask your salesperson? Here are some points to consider when you go digital camera shopping

- ✓ resolution/megapixel count
- ✓ optical and digital zoom
- ✓ automatic and manual features
- ✓ size/weight
- ✓ battery type/life
- ✓ grip
- ✓ software compatibility

Starting from zero

Let me start by revealing my limited initial knowledge of digital cameras, mainly defined by occasions where I've been stopped by tourists on the street to snap their photos. I'd vaguely heard the term megapixel bandied about and I knew it had something to do with the resolution. Basically I want to find the digital equivalent of my reliable analog camera which has been responsible for

my many rolls of vacation shots over the years – something that's reliable, takes good photos and is easy to use.

A quick digital education

Based on my limited knowledge of cameras, my first curiosity was what the heck is a megapixel anyway? Turns out it's one of the most important factors to consider when purchasing a digital camera, as it defines the picture resolution and print size. Today's digital cameras range from less than one megapixel on the low end to eight to 10 megapixels on the high end, with the three and four being about in the average range. While buying a camera with less than one megapixel resolution is okay for Web-only photos you should try and buy at least in the average range if you're planning to make any prints. Another technical aspect to consider is the zoom, which generally ranges from 3X to 12X, and allows you to take close up shots. Both optical and digital zoom are frequently referenced, the first of which is the more important, a true zoom which magnifies the images with the actual optical glass, whereas the second magnifies and extrapolates an area of the image digitally after using the optical zoom.

Besides the technicalities that affect how good your picture will look, it is important to find features that you're going to use. Many cameras feature controls that have specialized settings for portraits, landscapes, night pictures and other common situations. On some cameras these automatic settings are controlled via a dial on top of the camera and on others via the LCD screen. Standard automatic settings include portrait/land-

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scape/night time/action, and many cameras also allow the user to manually adjust certain settings just like on some analog cameras – such as shutter speed, lens aperture, and light metering.

In practical terms, elements such as size (cameras range from compact to large); battery type and life (some have their own rechargeable battery packs while others use the readily available disposable or rechargeable AA batteries); and a handy, secure grip are also things to consider when buying a camera. Some cameras also feature compensation for users with eyeglasses. Another thing you need to remember is to make sure that your computer has the required USB port for transferring your photos, and



that the software will be compatible with your computer's operating system.

Another important point to consider is the size and type of storage media. For an explanation of the various media types see: www.hubcanada.com/print_friendly_11087

Decision time

For me, the decision about which camera to buy came down to two questions: what was I going to use it for and how much could I afford to spend. I knew I

wanted to print as well as email my photos so I needed at least the average megapixel count. My budget was also a factor – like many before me I shared in the time-honoured shopping goal of wanting to spend as little as possible yet at the same time, I wanted to get a camera that I wouldn't have to replace in a couple of years.

In the end I settled for a camera with an average resolution of 3.2 megapixels, 3X optical zoom, and a size that was semi-compact. I decided to go with one that had the controls on the dial as I could see myself becoming impatient with the LCD screen for choosing options. The camera I picked has both automatic and manual settings, including some fun options like a panoramic setting that allows the user to take three shots in a row and stitch them together, as well as the ability to shoot up to three minute movies. While I thought of this last feature as a nice frivolous extra that I'd never use, it turned out to be a great perk and I made five little movies in my first weekend as a digital camera owner (mostly serious documentary work featuring my cat). While that was the bonus of my purchase, more disappointing was the fact that I realized I'd also have the extra expense of buying an additional memory card, as the one that came with my camera would only store 12 pictures.

In my search for the right place and the right price I asked friends and colleagues for suggestions, borrowed my Dad's Consumer Reports magazine to compare brands, went online to some camera review sites like www.dpreview.com, and visited some stores to get advice. Yet my main guide in choosing a camera was a moment of thoughtful reflection about what exactly I wanted to use the camera for. After that the decision was easy.

By Sue Bowness

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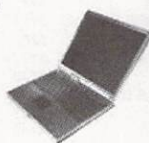
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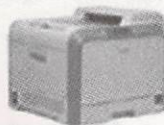
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Selling out

Digital photography to flog your online wares

The emergence of online auction Web sites like eBay and Yahoo! has been a real boon for those who want to sell all sorts of items for reasons all their own. But like any sales pitch, it almost goes without saying that you need a good visual representation of what you're selling in order to make the sale, or in the case of an online auction, to generate more bids.

While the average item for sale on eBay or Yahoo might be boxed, items without packaging are especially important to shoot well because the lack of packaging may imply that said items are not 'mint' or in 'like new' condition. Sure, you could (and probably should) write a wonderful and informative description, but photos will answer a lot of the questions prospective buyers might have. In one case illustrated, a red Jofa hockey helmet—which can be a hot seller on eBay because Jofa doesn't sell helmets in North America—is exactly the type of item I'm talking about. With a point-and-shoot digital camera and a large piece of white Bristol or poster board (readily available at any art supply store) you can put together a nice setting for any item. For an item like the helmet, which is somewhat large, it would be a good idea to get at least two poster or Bristol boards, so that you can place one behind the object, as well as under it.

The white background is important for two reasons: First It ensures that the item being photographed is the only object in the photo and second, It's one of the best light and flash diffusers you can find on the cheap.

You may not need to use a flash in most cases, but when you do, you'll get the best results by shooting the object from an angle in order to avoid the flash reflecting back into the lens, which creates an ugly glare effect. It's also important to experiment and perhaps minimize the flash's strength, which can be done in the manual setting of many digital cameras.

Fluorescent lighting can also be a valuable asset in taking a usable photo of your item without relying on a flash, albeit under the right circumstances. For instance, a black or navy blue-coloured item might not come out too well without a flash, though an item that is white or red should garner better results.

It's important to note that we're looking for clear, sharp imagery



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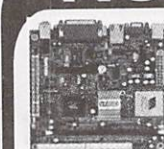
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here as opposed to high art.

Placing the item directly under the light will illuminate it considerably, thereby letting you take photos from a variety of angles without having to worry about glare. You can try using the same technique with darker items, since some of them – like books or shoes – might come out much better than items like satellite receivers or jewellery. Natural sunlight is also a good asset to use, provided rays hit the item indirectly. Placing the item near a window facing north or south on a nice sunny day could provide you with all the lighting you would need to shoot. Many items will actually look more appealing when shot using the sun as your light source, although results can always

vary.

Like everything in life, it will take practice to get the kind of photos that will really make your item stand out from the rest. But with digital photography, the process can be quick and painless, which means that getting it right will happen sooner rather than later.

By Ted Kritsonis



How to: auction photography part 1

Take more photos than you need and keep an archive

In virtually every case where you're going to post an item up for sale on eBay, Yahoo! or any other online auction, taking more photos than you think you need is a good idea. Although the work that goes in to setting up these mini-photo shoots isn't too time-consuming, it probably is in your best interest to shoot all the items you want to sell, as well as those you're thinking about selling. Not to mention that you should take plenty of shots of each item, in case an interested party requests an angled photo that you decided not to post on your auction.

It's also important to keep an archive of all the photos you take in case a similar item finds its way into your hands, or especially if you happen to repeatedly sell the same type of items. Yahoo has a limit of three photos, all free of charge, while eBay has a limit of 12 with the first one being free with subsequent images costing US\$0.15 each.

How to: auction photography part 2

The importance of cropping and adjusting photos

You've taken the last photo of your item and you're ready to upload them to your computer and post them with your item. Not so fast. As important as it is to shoot well, it's equally important to crop and adjust well. Using Adobe Photoshop or any similar image editing software, you can quickly and easily make all the proper adjustments. In Photoshop, for example, crop the image closely using the Crop tool, so that the item dominates the photo, and then go to the menu bar and choose >Image >Adjustments >Auto Levels. Photoshop will automatically adjust the lighting and colour balance of the photo, although it will sometimes overcompensate. If that's the case, undo and follow the same steps the same route but choose >Levels (as opposed to Auto Levels) and play with the levels sliders. Save the image as a JPEG. Now you should have a perfect photo that will take less time to upload from your end and less to download from the interested buyer's end.

Everyone is vying for a piece of Apple's overwhelming market share in HD-based digital music players. Creative, long a name in digital music, is having a go with its new Zen Micro line.

Available in a spectrum of colours with a 5GB HD versus the iPod Mini's 4GB, an FM tuner, voice recorder and productivity applications like a rudimentary calendar and appointment book.

With a price in line with iPod mini, a smaller footprint and a cacophony of colours (10 in all), the Zen Micro manages to offer more than the Apple product at the same price point. The only unknown is just how entrenched the iPod and its brethren are.

Pre orders are being accepted at US\$249.95 (\$312) and while a target November release has been mentioned, no exact date is available at the time of writing.



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Myst IV: Revelation

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
ESRB: Teen
Platform: PC
Price: \$49.99

Myst IV: Revelation, the latest entry in the multimillion-selling Myst franchise, is not only the most lifelike adventure in the series to date, but it's arguably the closest thing yet to virtual reality in a computer game.

The environments in Revelation are so lifelike that you'll want to touch the water, trees and rocks.

In fact, you can.

Using the mouse cursor, which resembles a small hand, you can interact with the world of Myst. You can "touch" water in a pond, for instance, and ripples will appear, or if you try to pet the wings of a bird that lands next to you, it will fly away. More than 70 minutes of full-motion video, including actors who walk and talk with you, add nicely to the realism.

This is certainly a departure from the 11-year-old Myst, a game that, while popular, was condemned by some critics as an interactive coffee table book that felt lifeless because of the static images to click through, not to

mention there was no one to interact with. For the uninitiated, the Myst games are best described as a point-and-click adventure played from a first-person perspective, where players must use the

mouse to navigate around a surreal island and through various "ages," all the while solving tough brainteasers in order to accomplish the game's goals. Puzzles vary from pulling the right levers and gears to reading notes and applying the correct clues to manipulate an object. The tough puzzles remain in Revelation, but now players can adjust the level of hints (or take none at all) so no player should get stuck on the journey. The story surrounds the two evil brothers introduced in the first game, Sirrus and Achenar, who remain trapped in separate prison worlds for corrupting peaceful worlds and their inhabitants. Their father, Atrus suspects their involvement in his young daughter's disappearance, so you're asked to travel to various worlds to solve this mystery.

The game's music is as extraordinary as are its visuals. Renowned artist Peter Gabriel has teamed up with composer Jack Wall to provide a beauti-

ful ambient soundtrack that changes depending on what's happening onscreen. Revelation ships on two DVDs, therefore a Windows or Mac-based PC with a DVD-ROM drive is required to play the game.

By Marc Saltzman



Good: -Attractive graphics

- Impressive technical achievements
- Solid, non-linear story

Bad: -Tough, sometimes obscure puzzles

- Disk space hog (8 GB for full install!)

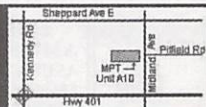


Final thought: Those who prefer a slower-paced journey with challenging puzzles won't find a better PC game this year.

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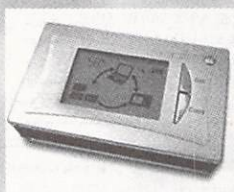
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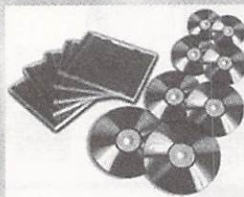
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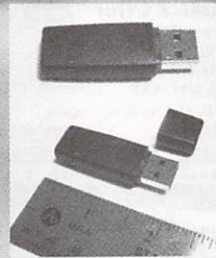
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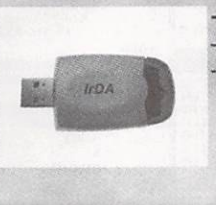
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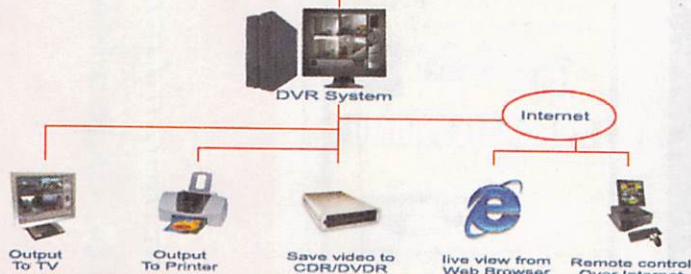
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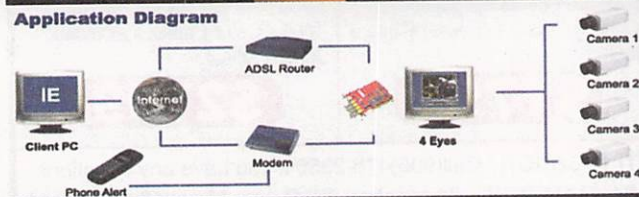
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Altec Lansing's GT5051 gets rid of the two rear 5.1 speaker wires by integrating the front and rear satellites into two units as opposed to four; one each for the left and right.

The top mounted speaker (rear) in the stack is angled to bounce sound off walls to behind users, which makes the set a theoretical good fit in a closed den setting but much less effective in an "open concept" space.

About \$187 from US\$149.95.

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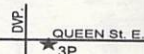
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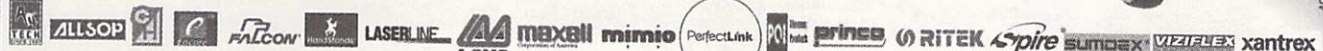
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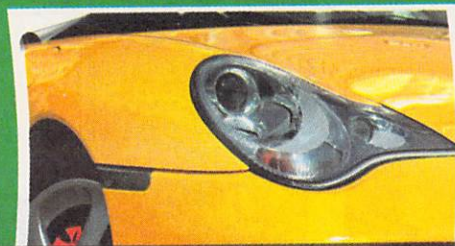


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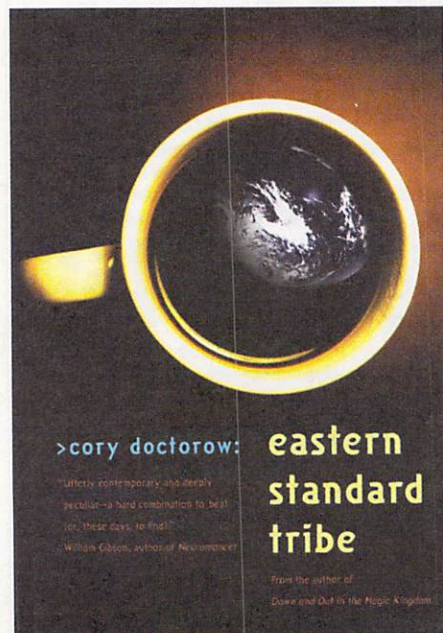
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William Gibson, author of *Countdown*

From the author of
Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom

fiction writer Cory Doctorow may have an answer.

Earlier this year, Sony launched the Librie EBR-1000EP in Japan, an eBook reader that weighs as much as a thick paperback, measures roughly 20 by 13 centimetres, and sells for \$41,790 (roughly \$480). There's a tiny but complete keyboard at the bottom, with a roller wheel for scrolling through the content. You can expand the storage with Sony memory sticks.

The display, which uses the new electronic ink technology, is said to be as easy to read as the printed page.

The Librie demonstrates that what's holding back eBooks is not the technology. In the years to come, handheld devices will become cheaper, lighter and more common, with better display technologies. The generation now learning to read will be accustomed to the electronic text. Already, there has been a hit novel in Japan, "Deep Love" by Yoshi, that was delivered to subscribers via cellular phones.

What keeps eBooks from reaching their potential is commercial restrictions. The Librie only accepts books in a proprietary format, and there are only a few hundred old Japanese titles available, which can be rented for sixty days but not bought. In North America, eBooks can be purchased but come with restrictions and hassles like user registration, incompatible file formats, licensing terms that make it illegal to read it aloud in public and other kinds of Digital Rights Management.

Doctorow sidestepped those commercial restrictions when he published his two novels, "Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom" and "Eastern Standard Tribe" and a short story collection. The paper editions are published under the Tor Books, but he's released the electronic versions under Creative Commons licenses, which allow him to release some of his rights. Readers can download the complete text of his books in the format of their choice for free, copy and transmit it to other people and even create lost chapters and other derivative works, as long as it's non-commercial and Doctorow retains attribution.

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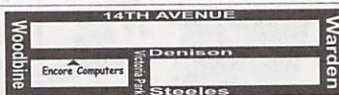
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Doctorow views the tens of thousands of downloaded copies of his work as helping sales of his work in print. "Some of the reason that it's selling well is because eBooks and paper books are intensely complementary. It's a really good way to recommend the book to a friend; just send them the book," says Doctorow.

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It's less important that his books are free-as-in-beer than it is that they are free-as-in-speech. Doctorow is part of the "copyleft" movement, which views existing copyright and intellectual property law as favoring business at the expense of the audience and the creator.

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By Peter Tupper

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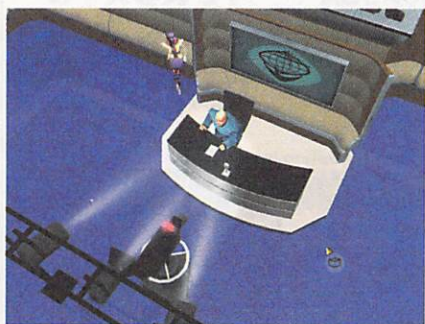
Evil Genius

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: Elixir Studios
ESRB: Teen
Platform: PC
Price: \$49.99

flicks, with their over-the-top villains, legions of devoted henchmen and hokey doomsday devices.

At the start of the game, you must first chose to be one of three malevolent megalomaniacs: Maximillian, who resembles a shorter and stockier Dr. Evil; Alexis, a sexy research scientist; or Shen Yu, a mysterious Chinese uber-criminal. Each "evil genius" has his or her own unique skills.

The first order of business is to build a secret underground base on an island. This lair will eventually house everything from holding cells with



interrogation chairs and torture devices (for captured agents) to meeting rooms used to plot your next evil deed. Players use the mouse to build each room and then equip it with objects such as a brain-washing machine and ping-

pong tables to keep workers happy.

After the base is established, it's time to click on the World Domination screen, a colorful map on which you decide what country to send your minions to. At this point, they can accomplish tasks such as stealing valuable art or recruiting new henchmen to join the cause. Those objectives must be performed without attracting too much heat or else governments will dispatch secret agents and soldiers to invade your base. Gamers can lay dozens of silly traps for unsuspecting intruders, including drop-down gas chambers and electrical currents that zap enemies into next week. There aren't many beefs with the game, but some of the menial tasks such as base building and instructing henchmen to return from overseas can take an awfully long time. Sure, it may add to the strategy as players risk invasion as they wait, but there is no option to speed up the game-

play [as with most other strategy games].

Minor interface issues also exist, but even with these shortcomings, Evil Genius is a fun and challenging game that should please strategy fans in search of something unique – and funny.

By Marc Saltzman

Good: -Lots of humour
 -Refreshingly different concept

Bad: -Single-player only
 -Some repetitive, menial tasks

Final thought: Megalomaniacal computer gamers should get a vicarious kick out of Evil Genius.

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Building the Ultimate Gaming PC

Part One

The Ultimate Gaming PC: the phrase alone raises goose bumps. Imagine a machine built for maximum power and speed with jaw-dropping good looks – if computers were cars, this PC would be a Ferrari.

It's fun to fantasize about building your own Ultimate Gaming PC ... but should the average human being actually attempt to do so? If your answer is "yes," then this new HUB series is for you. We call it "Building the Ultimate Gaming PC", and for good reason: over the next five issues, we will design, assemble, and troubleshoot our Ultimate Gaming PC.

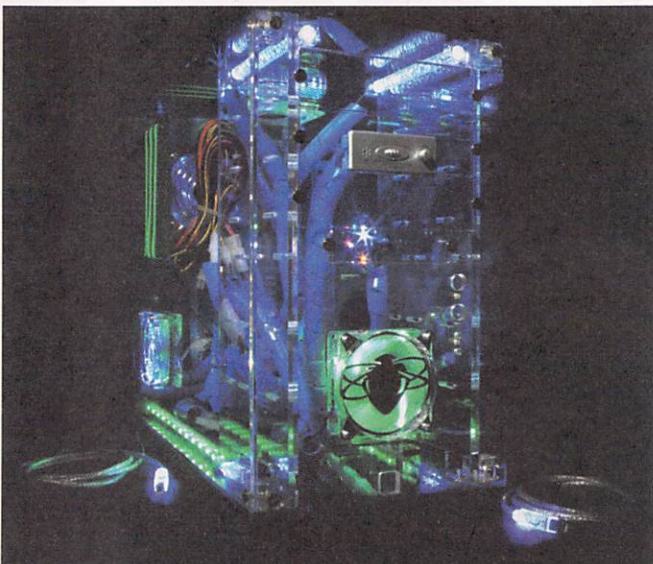
Of course, before we can start building our Dream Machine, we must decide what we need to create it.

First, we need the fastest CPU (Central Processing Unit) chip and motherboard that we can lay our hands on; backed by lots and lots of memory. Ideally, we want to be able to "overclock" the CPU: this means making the chip run quicker than its rated speed. Warning: better make sure that our system has sufficient cooling to handle the excess heat generated by overclocking, or the CPU could melt.

We also need the best video card we can find – one loaded with lots of onboard memory and processing power – in order to generate and 3D gaming graphics without slowing down our system. In the world of multi-player gaming – whether at a LAN party (where everyone brings their gaming PCs and hooks them together; hence the need for a cool-looking machine) or online over the Web – speed counts, and lack of speed can be fatal.

Speaking of speed, fast hard drives are a must for successful gaming. The faster our drives can feed data, the faster our PC will go. In addition,

we need a CD/DVD-ROM drive for loading games; one that can burn CDs and DVDs as well (in the more popular DVD formats, if possible) would be nice. Also critical are highly precise peripherals such as a wired mouse, joystick, and keyboard. Wireless mice are generally a bad idea: we don't want to miss a move due to a failed connection, or worse, dead batteries.



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To round out the Ultimate Gaming PC, we will need a decent sound card linked to either a 5.1 surround sound speaker system or a stereo gaming headset and of course, an excellent monitor. Let's not forget the power supply either: without enough juice to support all our devices, the system just won't run. In addition, we need a network-friendly operating system, and the best games we can find.

Did we miss anything? Yes: to create an Ultimate Gaming PC that fits the name, we need a modified case dressed up with lots of lights and custom-looking designs. Appearance counts: when we're up against the best at a LAN party, we want a cool-looking Ultimate Gaming PC.

These are the design requirements for the Ultimate Gaming PC that we're going to build. Based on these specs, we have been making the rounds of computer manufacturers and vendors, asking them to provide the very

best components for this project. Fortunately, they have done just that, as you'll see by looking over the Ultimate Gaming PC parts that we've collected to date.

The heart of our system is the CPU: to do the job, Intel (www.intel.com) has supplied a scorchingly-fast 3.6 GHz Pentium 4 PCI Express (PCI-E) 'Alderwood' chip. PCI-E effectively doubles the data throughput of the chip – important during game-playing – by using two data pathways, rather than the traditional one. Intel has also provided us with an Intel D925XCV motherboard; according to www.digit-life.com, "At present this is the top motherboard from this company." But is it the best for the job? ABIT (<http://abit.com>) doesn't think so: that's why they are supplying with an AAB DuraMAX motherboard; it comes equipped with μ Guru, which allows you to reset CPU clock speeds and monitors hardware performance. I'll be



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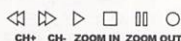
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doing a bit more research – well, a lot more – before deciding which one to use. The DDR2 memory modules for the system are from Corsair Memory (www.corsairmemory.com): we hope to get up to 4 GHz.

The all-important video card for our Ultimate Gaming PC is the ABIT RX800 Pro [a.k.a. Radeon

X800 Pro] with 475MHz clock speeds and 256MB GDDR3 memory onboard. At this point in time, the RX800 is definitely a 'video card of choice' for serious gamers, and the device that will put the real power into our Ultimate Gaming PC. Meanwhile, Western Digital (www.western-digital.com) has come up with two 10,000 RPM 74 GB WD Raptor hard drives. Our CD/DVD-ROM/RW is Plextor's PX-716A (www.plextor.com). It can read CD and DVDs and write CD-R/RW, DVD+R/RW, DVD-R/RW, and even DL DVD-R [dual layer] disks. As for audio? The Intel D925XCV motherboard comes with a "High Definition Audio" subsystem built-in, while the ABIT DuraMax has "S/PDIF In/Out" included: it delivers 7.1 sound.

For sound reproduction, Altec Lansing (www.alteclansing.com) is supplying its VS3151 5.1 surround sound speaker system and a pair of AHS 602 3D audio gaming headsets, while Samsung (www.samsung.ca) has loaned us a 17" SyncMaster 710N LCD flat panel monitor. Finally, we will be running Windows XP Pro (www.microsoft.com). At press time, the only parts left to get are the wired keyboard, mouse, and joystick; and some games.

Which brings us to the case, power supply, and internal cables; all of which are from Mutant Mods (www.mutantmods.com). It was this company's clear and blue acrylic case inspired this project a few months ago. Mutant Mods has also sent us a 480 watt "Reactor" power supply, and all kinds of goodies to dress up our Ultimate Gaming PC. They include red and blue shimmering "Bubble Tubes" and self-illuminating red EL connecting wire – for glowing through the Mutant Mods' case – a blue LED Ghost fan cover [it glows], colored cable tie, and blue metal screws.

Finally, to aid us in our project, we're using Maximum PC's "Guide to Building a Dream PC" (www.maximumpc.com). This profusely-illustrated guide is a godsend: it explains every aspect of building ultimate computers; what each part does, and how to put it altogether. We expect to wear out our copy over the next five months.

So ends our first installment. Next month, the project begins in earnest as we start to put the PC together. We'll have lots of photos, so that you can see what we do right and wrong!

by James Careless

James Careless (jamesc@tjtdesign.com) is a regular contributor to HUB Digital Living who wonders whether he has gotten in over his head this time. We'll see.

elio Photo Jukebox

Is it possible to out slick Apples near ubiquitous iPod?

Pros

- Slick design
- Bright colour screen
- 20GB storage

Cons

- Premium price
- Why no video support?
- SD card slot only

The elio PJ from Tatum certainly looks to be giving it a try and to some extent it's succeeds. First and foremost, the elio bests the iPod's [admittedly sharp] current monochrome LCD screen with a bright 2.2 inch 65K colour TFT LCD. There is talk of a colour screen iPod in the

works, however. And while Apple's line offers various coloured casings and such, the elio is only available in a super glossy jet black. Perfect for taking fingerprints, but painfully slick when clean. It ships with a handy elasticised belt clip that keeps the device from getting scratched while in transit. The screen itself is hidden when in the holster, however. Aside from the large colour screen, the next most distinguishing feature comes in the form of a glowing jewel surrounded by a four-way directional style control pad. The jewel itself serves little purpose aside from embellishing the already slick case. To that end, it also glows. Seeking through a few menus, users can change the coloured lights hidden behind the

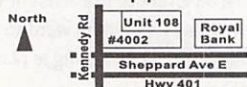
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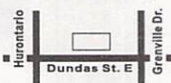
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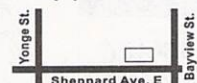
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translucent orb, from vibrant blue to bright red and about half a dozen stops in between. The control interface is nowhere near as functional as the iPod's, the standard point of comparison for any HD-based digital audio player. Instead of using the centre jewel as an enter key which would seem logical, the right key becomes the enter key while the left key is a sort of escape key, moving back through menus. It works well once you get used to it, but I still found myself pushing on the jewel to select menu options to no avail.

Music playing is only a part of the strategy for elio. The PJ in the product's title stands for photo jukebox; the 20GB hard drive can house up to 7,000 JPEG images, according to the product literature. And with a top mounted Secure Digital card slot, users with a similarly equipped digital camera can view pics directly from the camera on the elio's

screen.

As a digital music player – formats including MEGAPIXEL3, WMA, AAC and WAV supported – the elio plays back clearly (depending on the music quality, of course) but its colour screen is only put to limited use, displaying a graphic equalizer and or song title and artist / album information. I would have much preferred to see associating songs, albums and playlists with album art, a picture of the artist or whatever else users may want to have displayed while a song is playing.



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While users can't associate images with a song or playlist (i.e. display this pic or album art when playing this song, album or list), associating songs, albums or playlists with a slideshow is a pretty simple process. It's a small but important distinction.

With such a vibrant screen and with a large capacity (for mobile) HD drive, to not include some form of video playback option seems like fuzzy logic. When you consider the SD card slot for direct transfer from a digital camera – most of which have some sort of mode to record moving pictures – it seems especially strange not to support video.

Perhaps in a later firmware upgrade?

At just under \$500, the elio is considerably more expensive than even the premium priced iPod. The colour screen for photo viewing and the SD card slot for transferring files on the go may help to justify the price tag ... assuming the user's camera uses SD or MMC storage media. To be truly functional as a photo wallet for clearing out camera storage while on the go, more and more varied storage media slots are all but required. Even an off-board adapter for compatibility with other popular digital camera storage methods (as inelegant as such a solution might be) would be useful.

The price tag is hard to swallow given the lack of some logical features – most notably, the inability to offload camera storage other than SD or MMC – but the device's slick exterior and sharp colour screen certainly help its case.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

Dell Digital Jukebox 15GB

Dell's Digital Jukebox (15GB version tested) is a powerful little music player. Granted it isn't as svelte as the elio or some other hard drive-based digital music players, and its interface lacks easy navigation ... and it's a little on the bulky / heavy side relative to offerings from some other manufacturers. Still, it's a highly portable player and once users dedicate a few minutes to figuring out the interface, it's easy to use too. Sound quality is on par with other players in its range, though the included ear buds seem cheap.

As a first entry into the increasingly crowded digital music player field, Dell's initial offering is respectable. That said, users looking for an HDD-based player will want examine other options on the market or wait for Dell's DJ products to grow up (and shrink down) a bit. Already we're seeing smaller and more elegant offerings from the company. The DJ interface is functional and accessible, though lacks the grace of some other players. An included wired remote plugs in to the top of the player, the headphones plug in to it so users can skip songs or playlists, adjust the volume etc. on the go.

All in all, the 15GB DJ is a solid offering, but some more industrial design and a few usability feedback panels would give future models a fighting chance to unseat the incumbents. The first feature that should be included in future incarnations: direct music file transfer, please.

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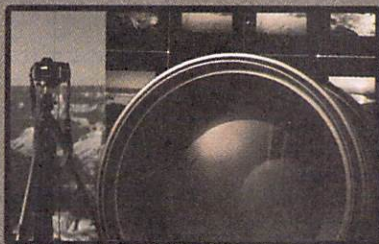
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Brightec Night Luminescent Photographic Paper

Brightec, a company that achieved some reputation when its paper became the medium for Super Bowl XXXVIII tickets, recently consumerized its "night luminescent" (read: glow in the dark) photo paper. The product isn't available at retail in Canada, nor can it be shipped here when ordering from the Brightec Web site (www.brightec.com). However, an email to inquire about the paper's availability in Canada suggests that company representatives will send the product across the border on an individual basis, shipping cost to be determined.

Compatible with all popular inkjet printers, the company says (here tested using an HP all-in-one), prints on Brightec's paper look nearly identical to prints on non-luminescent photo paper, except with a slight yellowish tinge in some light areas.

Much like glow in the dark toys that kids must "charge" before lights out, Brightec's paper functions better if it is given direct light before users start flipping through their luminous snaps. However, framed photos will still gather enough energy to glow when the lights go out without any extra steps. Photos will also really pop in dark and low-light conditions if they use bright colours and light backgrounds. When glowing, pictures take on a yellowish green quasi backlit look, which can be a bit eerie.

Users likely won't want to print out all their family photos using Brightec's product, given that a package of 10 4x6's costs about \$12.50 (from US\$9.99) or about \$1.25 for each sheet, not including the cost of shipping.

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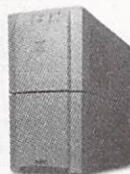
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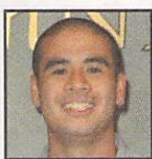
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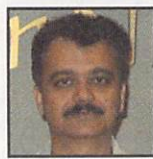
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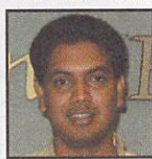
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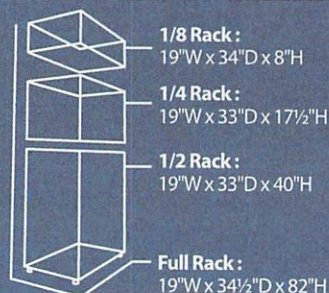
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The photo print industry is a-changing. With more and more people taking pictures using digital cameras and storing photo files on their PCs, there has been a reduction in traditional film processing and development and an increase in prints being created from digital files.

Existing print makers are changing business models to accommodate the shift, new companies are popping up to take advantage of burgeoning opportunities, and partnerships are being formed between the technology and photography industries.

As a result, consumers now have a wide variety of options to choose from when ordering prints of their favourite digital photos, one of which is online print makers.

HUB decided to do a little research by trying and comparing the services of a number of online print ordering services. As you'll see, we found prices varied by as much as 90 per cent, there was a noticeable difference in the quality of prints we received, and we observed several distinctions in service and accessibility.

It's worth noting that most online photo print services offer prints of various sizes, photo calendars and cards, and other types of photo printing services. We restricted our evaluation to the workhorse of the photo printing industry: the 4x6 glossy print.

AOL You've Got Pictures

pictures.aol.ca



on the computer then check off the photos they want prints of. Pictures upload quickly (less than ten seconds for a 400 KB file in our tests). Users can then edit and crop photos using a simple photo editing application, and the You've Got Pictures software automatically detects and alerts if any of the pictures aren't of proper resolution for a quality print.

AOL offers an introductory deal of five free 4x6 prints, with additional 4x6 prints priced at \$0.45 each – very expensive in comparison to other services we tried. Two delivery methods are available: express post, with delivery in two to three business days for \$3.99, and express courier, delivered in one to two days for \$8.99. We chose the former and received prints in less than 36 hours.

The prints came from MotoPhoto, a respected print lab, and were among the best quality of any received. The colours were bold with very few digital artifacts. No one we showed them to could tell that they were digital (as opposed to film) photographs.

As part of AOL's standard service, users get unlimited photo storing potential to create an archive of photo albums that can be shared with others online – which also makes it a simple matter to order additional prints.

Overall, we were very impressed with the You've Got Pictures service and the quality of the prints, but the relatively steep price is a sticking point.

Getting prints:

Online photo ordering Web sites

AOL's service is aimed at a less Web-savvy shutterbug who doesn't mind paying a premium for simplicity's sake.

FuturePhoto

www.futurephoto.com



prints is a snap.

Upon creating an account users are presented with an accessible interface to add, view, and share photos. In our tests it was a simple matter to find and upload photos, though the upload time was slightly slower than other services evaluated. After uploading, users can perform simple editing tasks like red eye correction and reversing images. FuturePhoto automatically crops photos of irregular dimensions but allows users to alter the cropping as they chose. Once pictures for print have been chosen, the application highlights the print sizes suited to each picture's resolution.

FuturePhoto offers five free 4x6 prints as an introduction to their service, with additional 4x6 prints priced reasonably at \$0.29 each. Consumers have the option of picking up photos at a local Future Shop, paying \$2.95 for five-day postal service, or shelling out \$7.95 for three-day courier service. We chose to pick our prints up at a nearby Future Shop. A day-and-a-half later we received an email stating that our photos were ready for pickup. Actually, we received three emails stating that they were ready – a bit of a nuisance.

The Kodak prints we received were of poor quality. Compared to prints of the same pictures from other services, colours were washed out and faded, diagonal lines were sometimes jagged and worst of all, several of the prints were ruined thanks to a careless technician's thumbprint.

Though the Web site was accessible and the price per print was appealing, the quality of the final product in this test case makes FuturePhoto hard to recommend.

Wal-Mart Photo Centre Online

www.walmart.ca/photo

As might be expected, given Wal-Mart's reputation for keeping a low overhead, the Wal-Mart Photo Centre Online Web site isn't as stylish or elegant

Did you know Windows XP facilitates online photo orders?

People running Windows XP can order prints online without ever accessing an Internet browser. In the My Pictures folder the left navigation pane features an "Order prints online" icon. Click on it and a new window containing thumbnails of the pictures in the folder will open with checkboxes beside each photo. Check the pictures you want prints of and click "Next". You'll be provided with a list of vendors from which you can order prints. The list will be populated with print makers whose Web sites you have visited before, registered with and downloaded a plugin from. Choose one and follow the steps provided (they'll be different depending on the company you choose). That's it.

as most other online print ordering services. As a result, the photo ordering process is unintuitive.

We had problems navigating the site to place an order and encountered technical problems on a number of occasions when initiating uploads – though when uploads work they are comparatively fast.

Once users figure out how to work their way through the site, Wal-Mart Photo Centre Online offers a surprising number of features. The picture editing software is more than adequate, and it automatically provides resolution detection and print size recommendations. Perhaps the best feature is the free My Photo Site creator, which allows users to create their own photo gallery Web site with a wide variety of customization options – even password protection so strangers can't view personal photos.

While the site doesn't offer any apparent introductory offers, Wal-Mart has the best price of any service we saw, with 4x6 prints priced at \$0.25 each. Wal-Mart won't deliver photos to your door, but most brick and mortar locations offer next day pick up, and a select few locations in four provinces

The Shutterfly website interface features a woman holding a photo of her family. Navigation links include "Returning members", "Email: shroop@shutterfly.com", "Password:", "Sign in", "Forgot password?", and "Not a member?". Below the navigation bar, there are several promotional banners: "22¢ prints", "Create a Snapbook", "Save 40%", and "Custom Photo". The bottom of the page lists various services like "Photo Albums", "Photo Cards", "Photo Gifts", "Photo Prints", "Photo Stationery", "Photo Wallpapers", "Photo Postcards", "Photo Calendars", "Photo Books", "Photo Frames", "Photo Magnets", "Photo Keychains", "Photo T-Shirts", "Photo Mugs", "Photo Pillows", "Photo Blankets", "Photo Stickers", "Photo Scrapbooks", "Photo Albums", "Photo Cards", "Photo Gifts", "Photo Prints", "Photo Stationery", "Photo Wallpapers", "Photo Postcards", "Photo Calendars", "Photo Books", "Photo Frames", "Photo Magnets", "Photo Keychains", "Photo T-Shirts", "Photo Mugs", "Photo Pillows", "Photo Blankets", "Photo Stickers", "Photo Scrapbooks".

Shutterfly requires users to install a small program that simplifies the photo ordering process. This application is both graceful in navigation and hip in style; it efficiently leads users through a few simple

steps to complete an order. The fact that thumbnails are automatically displayed as users browse for pictures makes photo selection a breeze. Shutterfly also impresses with fast upload speeds; around six seconds for a 400 KB photo.

The Shutterfly software provides a robust selection of simple editing features, including effects such as soft focus and black and white as well as precise red eye reduction controls. It also allows users to place lengthy messages on the backs of prints.

4x6 prints start at US\$0.22 (approx. \$0.28). Shutterfly offers the best introductory offer we saw: 15 free prints. They also offer periodic promotions; the one that was up in our tests was a free 5x7 print with orders over US\$10. Prints are shipped for US\$3.99 (approx. \$5) within two days, but can take up to eight business days to arrive (though ours were delivered to Toronto, ON in four). The wait might be lengthy but it proves worthwhile. The prints we received were beautiful, matching the quality of AOL's MotoPhoto prints in every way.

Shutterfly equaled or outperformed the other services we tried in terms of quality, price, and ease of use. Assuming the lengthy delivery period is tolerable, Shutterfly is the best bet of the sites tested.

—Chad Sapieha

The Wal-Mart Photo Centre website interface features a navigation bar with "MY PHOTOGRAPHY" and "MY PHOTOGRAPHY". Below the navigation bar, there are several promotional banners: "ORDER PRINTS NOW!", "ORDER GIFTS NOW!", "ORDER A GALLERY NOW!", "SAME DAY PRINTING", "15¢ per print", and "A waiting club here!". The bottom of the page lists various services like "Photo Albums", "Photo Cards", "Photo Gifts", "Photo Prints", "Photo Stationery", "Photo Wallpapers", "Photo Postcards", "Photo Calendars", "Photo Books", "Photo Frames", "Photo Magnets", "Photo Keychains", "Photo T-Shirts", "Photo Mugs", "Photo Pillows", "Photo Blankets", "Photo Stickers", "Photo Scrapbooks".

offer same day printing. It may prove appealing to simply jump online and order a few prints before heading off to Wal-Mart for a cheap-stuff shopping trip. Wal-Mart was the hands down winner for speed and price.

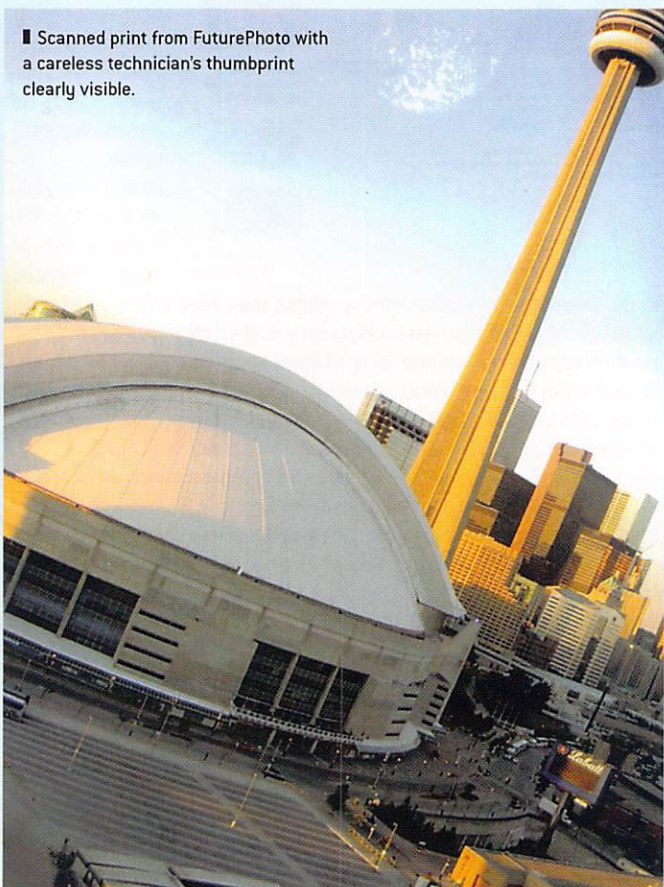
The quality of the prints we received was average. No defects were immediately apparent, and the colours appeared vibrant. Closer inspection and comparison revealed that prints from AOL and Shutterfly were slightly cleaner and brighter, but not by a significant margin.

If you can summon up the courage to brave Wal-Mart's lineups, don't mind the shifty-eyed store greeter, and can work your way through the convoluted interface of their Web site, Wal-Mart Photo Centre Online provides what is apparently the best price around combined with rapid service.

Shutterfly www.shutterfly.com

One of the most well respected online photo print ordering companies in North America, Canadians who use Shutterfly face lengthy delivery times as packages are shipped from the U.S. but receive excellent quality, well-priced prints.

■ Scanned print from FuturePhoto with a careless technician's thumbprint clearly visible.



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Digital Photography Tutorial 10

Filters for effects the old fashioned way

The photographic filter has long been an important tool, but in this era of endless digital special effects you might be thinking that it's become a relic from analogue times. To some extent that's true. The digital camera's built-in white balance system has reduced the need for temperature-compensating filters, while the image effects you can apply even with an inexpensive image editor rival what you can achieve with a filter. Moreover, software-generated effects can be undone, whereas you're stuck with the effect that a filter produces – like it or not – since it is recorded as part of the original frame.

But filters are still handy, and just because you've gone digital that's no reason to ignore their potential benefits. One of the most useful is the polarizing filter, which saturates colours and reduces or eliminates glare and reflections. If you like to take pictures of sea critters at the beach, for example, the polarizing filter is the best way to reduce the glare from the surface of the water. Graduated density filters are also useful for scenes with two areas of extreme contrast – dark forest and bright sky, for example. Normally you'd have to wash out the sky to properly expose the forest, or send the forest into dark shade to properly expose the sky. The graduated density filter kicks down the brightness of the sky so the entire scene can be properly exposed. Other useful filters include UV filters that reduce the haze noticeable with objects in the distance and various diffusion filters that give a flattering glow to portraits.

When it comes to actually using filters there's another problem you might face. Only some higher-end digital cameras have a threaded lens barrel or some other means to attach filters and such. If your camera is not so endowed, you'd be out of luck, were it not for a slick gadget called the Cokin Shoe Holder (www.cokin.fr). It presents a simple solution to a common problem, much like the original Cokin filter system did more than a quarter of a century ago.

If you're not familiar with Cokin (invented by French photographer Jean Coquin), here's a brief background. Interchangeable lenses are great, but they don't use a single common filter size. If you have several different lenses, you'd need several sizes of every filter you want to use, which can turn into quite an expense affair. The Cokin system splits the filter into three interchangeable components: the filter itself, a series of inexpensive threaded adapters of various diameters and a slotted holder that the filter and adapter slide into. With this system you don't have to buy multiple sizes of the same filter, just different sized adapters, which are much less expensive.

The Shoe Holder is another "one size fits all" device. Available separately or as part of the Digital Filter System, the Shoe Holder is a right angle bracket that attaches to a camera's tripod socket and holds a filter in front of the lens. The bottom plate can be adjusted to accommodate various lens configurations. The part of the bracket that sits in front of the lens is a modified filter holder that accepts Cokin's "A" size filters. Presently Cokin, which is now handled in Canada by Konica-Minolta, has more than 150 filters available.

By David Tanaka

Canon PowerShot G2 equipped with Cokin's Shoe Holder



Learn To Make Great Digital Photos For 5 Bucks!

By Tim Grey
FairShake Press
ISBN 0-321-30361-X
Paperback, 56 pages
Price: \$5.00

Learn To Make Great Digital Photos For 5 Bucks! provides a good primer for those who are new to digital cameras and photography. It's divided into four sections. The first explains some of the features typically found on mid-range digital cameras. The second covers exposure modes. The third section is short but contains a few very good tips on handling various lighting situations, while the final section rounds things out with some "pro" pointers to help take better pictures.

Given the nature of the approach, most of the topics are dealt with in just a few paragraphs. However, the explanations are clear and illustrated with at least one photo, making the book easily worth the cover price.

Also in the *Learn ... For 5 Bucks!* series are titles covering the Canon EOS Digital Rebel and Nikon Coolpix specifically, plus a few titles not related to digital cameras.

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Animated Blood,
Violence



Good or evil? Sorcerer or sword wielder? Gay or straight?

These are a few of the game-altering decisions Fable players are presented with as they make their way through the game.

Best described as action role-playing, acclaimed game brain Peter Molyneux's (Populous, Homeworld, Black & White) Fable is excellent but has a hard time living up to its own hype.

The development team weren't able to include all of the features Molyneux himself spoke about early in the development cycle.

Some additions like trees that grow with the passage of time for example, were scrapped. However if gamers haven't been following the Fable ... fable, these features would have been icing and likely wouldn't be missed. That said, for a game that offers such a wealth of potential choices and

Fable

Publisher: Microsoft Developer: Big Blue Box Studio Platform: Xbox

paths to players, locking gamers with no option for a female lead character seems odd.

The game strives to be open-ended, and in many regards it succeeds. However, gamers with an eye to following the story can follow yellow markers on the map to advance. Even with some fairly heavy exploration, striking up conversations with townsfolk and taking on side quests, gamers will be hard pressed to find more than 20 hours of gameplay. Fortunately, the majority of the 20 hours is solid.

Fable is unique in that choices made in the game and even a gamer's playing preference has a direct impact on the game world and the characters in it. If gamers choose the sword, the lead character will gradually develop muscles and will, with persistence, be a hulking warrior. On the other hand, choosing sorcery as the primary means of combat will result in a skinnier character with iridescent skin and higher intelligence.

Townsfolk will also react differently to the lead character. If gamers choose the path of righteousness, the character takes on a saintly glow and townsfolk will adore him. Choose evil and he takes on a reddish cast, devil horns begin to sprout and the eyes take on an icy glare. Then, the townsfolk's reverence turns to fear.

INFO BOX

<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Beautiful graphics -Choices affect experience -Somewhat open gameplay 	<p>Bad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Too short -No character gender options
<p>Final thought: Hype or no, Fable is a big achievement</p>	

Under the Skin

Publisher: Capcom Developer: Capcom Platform: PS2

Gamers assume the role of the "rascally" Cosmi, an alien from the planet Meiwaku in Under the Skin, a simplistic game where havoc is the mandate. A rite of passage for the residents of Meiwaku as they pass from child to adulthood is to go to a neighbouring planet and cause all the ruckus they possibly can. Such is it that we meet Cosmi on his trip to earth. Being the ambitious sort, Cosmi attempts to impress his peers by pranking our fair planet – apparently it's the hardest one to get a rise out of.

Under the Skin is unique in that, rather than taking on the role of a human character trying to ward off alien invasion, gamers are the alien invasion. Albeit a good-natured one.

Problem is, the invasion is supposed to be surreptitious. That kind of falls apart when the evening news plays a clip of Cosmi's space ship crash landing on earth. Now the humans are up in arms and Cosmi certainly can't just walk the streets undisguised.

Using a ray gun, gamers can zap humans walking around the levels and run to one of the UFOs scattered around the board to change in to that per-

son. Thus disguised, Cosmi pranks the poor humans, using thumbtacks, karaoke machines, boxing gloves, bowling balls, tornados, fireworks and other items. Fireworks for example, when placed on the ground will emit a shower of sparks. Humans, being a curious race, will run over to take a look. After a short delay – and hopefully after a large crowd has gathered – the fireworks blow up. Humans drop coins when pranked and each level has a gathering goal.

Collect 500 coins or collect more coins in 10 minutes than your computer controlled opponent, for example.

The gameplay is derivative and overly simplistic; in fact, it's little more than an item-grab 3D game, albeit packaged in an interesting way. That said, there's certainly some fun to be had. More if you can get a friend in on the action for the multiplayer portion.

—Andrew Moore-Crispin



INFO BOX

<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Novel premise -Pick up and play -Fun multiplayer 	<p>Bad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Derivative gameplay -Gets tedious
<p>Final thought: Worth a weekend rental</p>	

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